

TEXAS

M E S S E N G E R

The Texas District • The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

“When it comes to the Gospel, the Good News of being absolved of our sin, it has nothing to do with our worthiness or merit.

Rev. Michael Newman,
President

We want to share what God is doing in your church!

Send in your news:
txmess@txlcms.org

The first sermon of Jesus

What were Jesus' first words to a waiting and wounded world? He said, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"** (Mark 1:15).

That's our message, too. It is a crucial revelation for every broken life. In the middle of bad news, meaningless news, confusing news and distracting news, there is Good News. Not only does it exist, but the Creator of the universe came down to turn you toward it, bless you with it and call you to share it.

Sometimes we get confused about that. We become convinced that people need to get their acts together first. If they had faith like us or virtue like us or lives like ours, they may have a chance. But that's not what God's Word reveals.

God makes very clear that **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Romans 3:23). And, when it comes to the Gospel, the Good News of being absolved of our sin, it has nothing to do with our worthiness or merit.

Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper noted in his **Christian Dogmatics**, "Absolution rests neither on self-aroused contrition nor on true contrition worked by the Holy Ghost through the Law; neither on confession of all sins before men nor on any sort of human satisfaction. Absolution is based solely on the fact of world reconciliation by the perfect satisfaction of Christ and on the divine command (John 20:21; Luke 24:47) in Christ's name to proclaim the remission of sins provided by Him. And this proclamation of forgiveness for Christ's sake, in no wise

affected by human worthiness or unworthiness, the hearers are to believe" (Vol. 3, 194).

He goes on: "Among all nations and in all climes not a single person can be found whom we would be deceiving if we not only assured him, but affirmed it with an oath in the name of God: 'Through Christ God is reconciled to you, does not impute your sins to you, but forgives them'" (Vol. 3, 195).

What if we decide to substitute our judgments and conditions in place of God's gift of repentance and Good News? Pieper answers, "That places the Christian religion in the one class with the pagan work religions" (Vol. 3, 199).

The breathtaking truth is this: "To create this faith, Christ wants both repentance and remission of sins proclaimed in His name (Luke 24:47). For that reason Scripture says that faith cometh by hearing (Rom. 10:17), and the Apology teaches with Scripture: "Faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel" (Trigl. 263, XII, 42) (Vol. 3, 201).

If we want a wounded world to live, we are called to trust and echo Jesus' generous first sermon.

Join me in a day of repentance on Ash Wednesday, March 5. Visit txlcms.org/day-of-repentance2025.

Rev. Michael W. Newman
President

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Read John 20:21-23 and Luke 24:47. Pieper notes that these commands are for all Christians. Who brought you this Good News and with whom can you share it this month?

Prayer starter: Thank God for His grace, the free gift of forgiveness in Christ Jesus.



**THE LUTHERAN LITERACY PROJECT:
Sharing the Joy of Reading**

With the help of the Lutheran Literacy Project, Grace Lutheran Church, Del Rio, demonstrated the power of community by hosting a successful free book fair. The congregation enthusiastically collected books, spread the word through local advertising and invited families, teachers and neighbors to participate. Their efforts brought people together and placed books in the hands of countless children and families, sparking inspiration for similar events in other congregations.

Encouraged by Grace's success, congregations in Monahans and Fort Stockton are now exploring plans to host their own book fairs in 2025. These events aim to continue building bridges between churches and their communities through literacy.

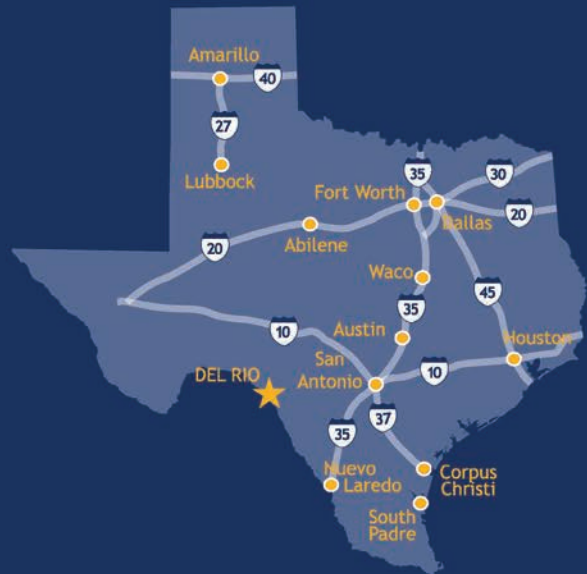
The Lutheran Literacy Project is extending its outreach beyond book fairs by participating in events like Fort Griffin's Education Days and the "Boo in the Zoo" celebration in Carlsbad, N.M. Thousands of books were distributed, and families were introduced to the joy of reading, ensuring this ministry leaves a lasting impact wherever it goes.

Through events like these, we witness how sharing books can also share the love of Christ. Learn more at txlcms.org/news or txlcms.org/videos.

**SPREADING
THE GOSPEL
ACROSS TEXAS**

Your contribution to Texas Partners in Mission goes directly to support missions in the Texas District.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



GIVE NOW!
txlcms.org/tpim



PRAY

It is our number one priority. Our goal is to have 10% of the Texas District, LCMS members praying regularly for the mission. bit.ly/missionprayertx



GIFTS

No gift to Texas Partners in Mission is too small. We need gifts to reach the thousands of people in Texas with the life-saving Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Every dollar contributed to Texas Partners in Mission goes directly to bringing the Gospel to people who don't know Jesus Christ. Thank you for your dedication to the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ!

"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." ~ Mark 16:15



Building spiritual wells



Deaconess Noemi Guerra
Districtwide Evangelist
Development Ministry Leader

“But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.” John 4:14

We see something incredible: Jesus goes out of His way to seek out a Samaritan woman at a well. She wasn't looking for Him, but He was looking for her. In the midst of her daily routine, Jesus meets her, fully aware of her past and her pain, and offers her something far greater than physical water: living water that leads to eternal life. This moment wasn't just about quenching physical thirst; it was about Jesus seeking her out, meeting her in her brokenness, and offering hope, forgiveness and new life.

Today, He is still looking for those who are lost, thirsty, disconnected and burdened. And He invites us to join in His mission by building spiritual wells where He can meet others and offer His life-giving grace.

Why Join?

Our world is full of people who are spiritually thirsty, many of whom aren't stepping into churches. Through the Evangelist Training Ministry, you can learn how to be part of Jesus' ongoing work by building what we call “spiritual wells” — places where He meets people in their everyday lives. Whether it's in your workplace, a park, or even over a cup of coffee at your kitchen table, you can help create spaces where Jesus does what only He can do: offer living water to those around you.

You don't need to have all the answers. You just need to be willing. Jesus does the real work; He seeks, He meets and He transforms. We simply join

in His mission, pointing people to the One who offers true life.

What You'll Gain

1. Confidence to Build Spiritual Wells

You'll learn how to start by meeting tangible needs. Maybe it's offering a listening ear, praying for someone or sharing a meal. Just like Jesus beginning with a simple request for water, you'll discover how ordinary moments can open doors to share about the hope we have in Him.

2. Skills to Have Meaningful Spiritual Conversations

Bringing up faith can feel intimidating, but with training, you'll gain the confidence to engage in meaningful conversations. You'll learn how to listen well, empathize and gently share about Jesus in a way that feels natural.

3. The Joy of Inviting Others to 'Come and See'

After meeting Jesus, the Samaritan woman didn't keep her encounter to herself. She ran back to her community, inviting them to “come and see.” Many believed because of her testimony. That's what we get to do — invite others to come and meet Jesus, the One who seeks and saves.

Ready to Take the Next Step?

Jesus is actively seeking those who are lost and disconnected. He meets people in their brokenness and offers them living water. Now He invites you

to help build spiritual wells — places where He can meet others and change their lives forever.

So ... are you ready to join us? We can't wait to welcome you! The Texas District Evangelist Training Ministry exists to equip everyday Christians to share the Gospel and launch new faith communities in everyday places and spaces.

For more information, please visit txlcms.org/evangelisttrainingseries.



2024 Ministry Highlights



Brian Hamilton, CPA
Chief Financial Officer

2024 was a year of profound gratitude and growth for Legacy Deo. We reflect on the incredible honor of partnering with individuals who are radically generous and committed to living out their legacies in Christ.

We are deeply thankful to God for His countless blessings, which have sus-

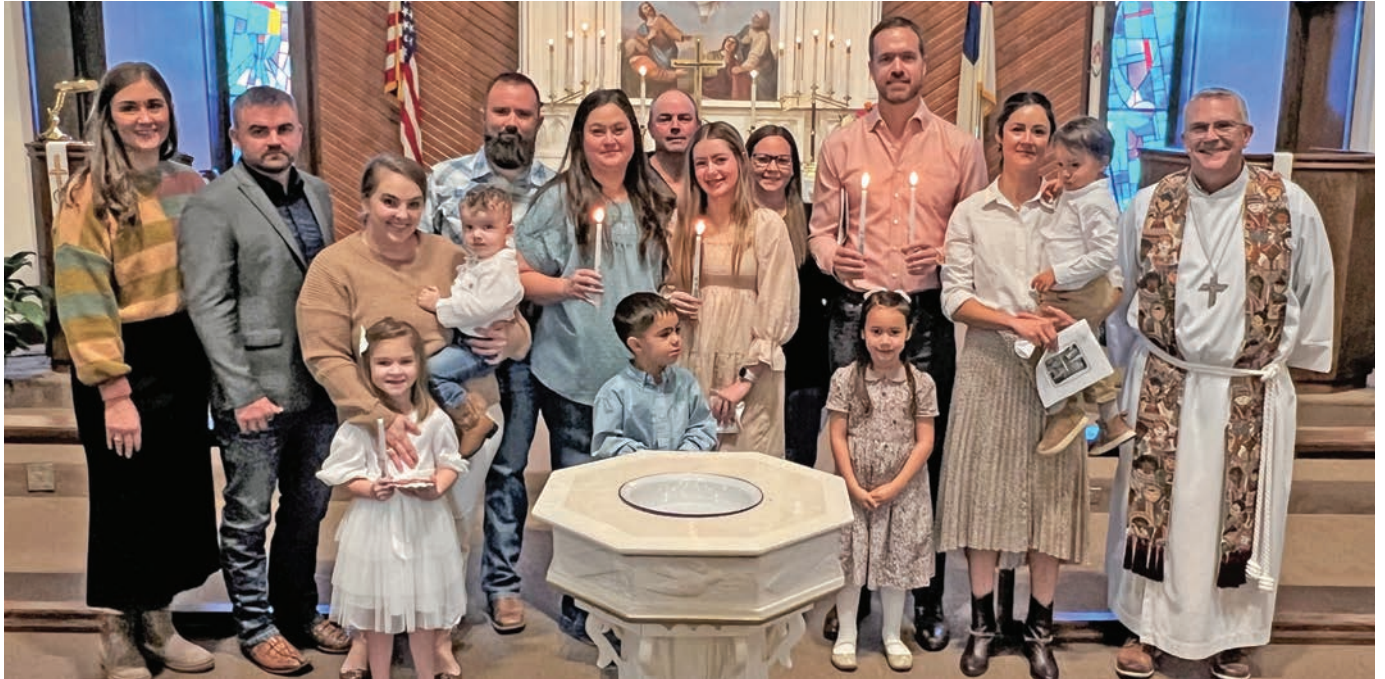
tained us through every season. His faithfulness continues to guide us as we steward the gifts He has entrusted to us, and we stand in awe of how He is moving in our midst.

As we look ahead, we are filled with a renewed sense of purpose, knowing that we are carrying forward the vision He set 65 years ago. With hearts full of hope, we step into the future, trusting in His perfect plan and relying on His strength to continue the mission He has laid before us.

To God be the glory, now and forever.



2901 Caballo Ranch Road
Bldg 4/Units C and D
Cedar Park, Texas 78641
legacydeo.org
800-880-3733



Happenings Around Texas

Submit your news!

Send photos, stories and newsletters for
The Lutheran Witness to:

txmess@txlcms.org

Texas Messenger
1221 Satellite View
Round Rock, TX 78665

Please be sure all photos sent electronically
are in color and high resolution. Also, send
your news to us well in advance (think three
to four months), if possible.

The Texas Messenger is available online at
txlcms.org.

THORNDALE

Baptisms at St. Paul

On Jan. 12 (above), not only did the congregation of St. Paul celebrate the Baptism of Our Lord, but also the Baptisms of six children! Pictured are, from left, Courtney Melde and Ross Parks (sponsors); Jennifer Strowmatt with Tesslynn and Walker (Baptized); Dustin and Keeley Paul with Hudson (Baptized); Kennedy Clawson (Baptized); Clayton and Kacie Cargill (sponsors); Adam and Chisun Messick with Leila and Charlie (Baptized); and Rev. Jeff Doria

And on Dec. 22 (below), Parker O'Campo was also Baptized! Pastor Doria is pictured with Parker and parents Bailey and Melanie O'Campo.



CIBOLO**Installation at Word of Life**

On Nov. 3, Rev. Philip Doublestein was installed as associate pastor of Word of Life. Pictured are, from left (front row) Revs. Mark Barz, Crown of Life, San Antonio; Ken Mitschke, Word of Life senior pastor; Philip Doublestein; Rick Pfaff, emeritus; (middle row) Ted Benson, Resurrection, Spring; Mike Middaugh, Mount Calvary, San Antonio; Dave Murillo, St. Paul, San Antonio; Dr. Brian Kachelmeier, Crown of Life, San Antonio; Ed Giese, Christ Our Savior, San Antonio; (back row) Craig Meissler, Mount Calvary, San Antonio; Carlos Boerger, LINC South Texas; John Diaz, emeritus; Dale Brynestad, Cross, New Braunfels; and Dr. Chris Kennedy, Shepherd of the Hills, San Antonio.

**THE GROVE****Baptism on the last Sunday of 2024**

The first Sunday after Christmas (the last Sunday of the year of Our Lord) saw the Baptism of two dear children of God at St. Paul, brother and sister Raegan Forrester Price and Madeline Marie Michalk. Pictured are, from left, Amanda Barron (sponsor); Madeline and Raegan with parents Elizabeth and Jacob Michalk; and Rev. John Heckmann. Not pictured is sponsor David Howell.



HAPPENINGS

NACOGDOCHES

New members received

The congregation of Redeemer joyfully welcomed these new members to the family of God late last year. Pictured are, from left, Ella Mae and Charles Kroll; Judy Steele; Rev. John Cain; Olivia Payne; Kelly Hughes; Anne Ray; and Emily, Leilani and Michael Leland.



DEVINE

New member at Divine Savior

On Jan. 12, the Baptism of Our Lord, Ricky Dozal confessed the Christian faith and became a member of Divine Savior. He is pictured with Rev. Randall Wehmeyer.



BASTROP

New members at Epiphany

Epiphany grew by two on Sunday, Jan. 12, with the reception of Ray and Yvonne Loynes into membership. They are pictured with with Rev. E.B. Holschuh.



CENTERVILLE

Rejoicing over new members

Our Savior welcomed new members in November. Pictured are, from left, Alfred Daniel, Rev. Keith Bowman, and Sandra and James Salters.



HAPPENINGS

SAN ANGELO

Help for Haiti

Students (K-12) of Trinity Lutheran School are pictured around an offering for Help for Haiti, a program of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation (LHF). Each student was given a tube of mini M&Ms, which they could eat and then fill up with quarters and turn in as their chapel offerings for August and September. After watching a video provided by LHF, the students were motivated to help those in need in Haiti.



LFL ESSAY CONTEST

Attention students!

The Lutherans For Life (LFL) Council of Federation Presidents sponsors an essay contest each year for students in two grade categories: 6-8 and 9-12. This contest is available for students in all states who attend a Lutheran school or a Lutheran church.

Contestants will be awarded cash prizes if their essay is selected as a first- or second-place entry in the Texas District contest and/or the national contest.

To participate, students will write a life-affirming essay based on the theme "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made," using Psalm 139:13-14: ***"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."***

The LFL Council of Federation Presidents looks



forward to students across the nation participating in the contest and letting their voices be heard through their life-affirming essays.

Questions? Please contact Virginia Flo at vflo@lutheransforlife.org.

Or visit the essay webpage or scan the QR code: lutheransforlife.org/2025-lutherans-for-life-essay-contest.



HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

Congratulations to those who are celebrating marriages of 50 years or more:



Jimmie and Debbie Curry

St. Paul, The Grove
Aubrey and Dorothy Richter
74 years, March 3

Stan and Janice Dake
55 years, March 26

Gethsemane, Houston
Stuart and Barbara Chase
70 years, March 3

Immanuel, Houston
Rev. Claudio and Elisa Perez
66 years, Dec. 20

St. Paul, Thorndale
Kenneth and Alice Haverkamp
61 years, Jan. 25

Billy and Connie Carlson
51 years, Jan. 26

Our Savior, Centerville
Jimmie and Debbie Curry
50 years, Dec. 31

St. Matthew, Westfield
Bob and Jeanne Langley
52 years, Feb. 17

Trinity, Dime Box
Donald and Lucille Leitko
70 years, March 5



Rev. Claudio and Elisa Perez

Laudamus tour to hit Texas

Laudamus, the premier choir of students from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis (CSL), will perform under the theme “My Song is Love Unknown” at six locations in Texas in March.

The tour theme is drawn from Samuel Crossman’s powerful hymn, which is featured in the program along with other music for Lent, designed to deepen worship experiences during this penitential season. The performances will include various pieces — from traditional choral settings to newer works — all aimed at sharing the message of God’s deep and sacrificial love.

“Our program this year helps us to see the incredible love of God the Father in sending His own Son to redeem us from sin, death and the power of the



devil,” said Dr. Samuel Eatherton, assistant professor of Practical Theology, cantor, and director of *Laudamus*. “Set within the Service of Evening Prayer, this Lenten program also expresses the love we have in thankfulness to our Savior for the salvation He brings.”

Laudamus performances are free and open to the public. Freewill offerings will be collected to support CSL music arts programs.

SCHEDULE

Sunday, March 16
7 p.m. – Zion, Dallas

Monday, March 17
1:30 p.m. – Texas District office, Round Rock
7 p.m. – Mount Calvary, San Antonio

Wednesday, March 19
10:30 a.m. – St. Paul, Serbin
12:10 p.m. – Immanuel, Giddings
7 p.m. – St. Paul, Austin

God bless our preschool directors



Dr. Bill Hinz

Director, School Ministry

Every day in our Lutheran preschools across the district, children learn about the love of Jesus and His forgiveness

for each of them. Sharing the love of Jesus with children reaches families and communities for Christ. These children — young missionaries — take the Gospel back to their families. Each year we are blessed to witness countless Baptisms of both children and family members.

The many dedicated early childhood center directors have the privilege of helping to shape the next generation. The time that is invested in their staff, students and families has a lasting and eternal impact. Life lessons are taught, and faith is shared to develop a strong foundation in Jesus Christ.

Each year in November, our early childhood directors are blessed to attend a retreat for a time of renewal, learning, study of the Word and fellowship. Each new director is paired with an experienced mentor to help with the critical transition to leadership. Mentors stay connected to their new directors throughout the year, offering prayer support and encouragement while connecting these new leaders to many resources.

Our theme for the retreat was “We Can Do More — Together” from 1 Thess. 5:11; **“Therefore encourage one another, and build one another up, just as you are doing.”**

Along with learning from and being inspired by the keynote speaker, the directors attend sessions such as “Implementing a Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum Environment” and “Establishing and Maintaining an Effective Organization.”

The Texas District Early Childhood Council plays a vital role in planning and providing leadership opportunities throughout the year. In addition to the retreat, there are monthly Zoom meetings with special speakers, a conference in February with special sessions for leaders, and the Administrators’ Conference in July. Leaders have wonderful opportunities to continue to grow in leadership as they serve the Lord.

I thank God for our Christ-centered directors who are using their God-given abilities to provide able leadership. I thank God for the faithful preschool teachers, and I also thank God for our pastors who proclaim the Gospel in our early childhood centers. Lifting up these vital ministries in prayer and through encouragement is a wonderful blessing.



Early childhood directors gathered for a retreat Nov. 4–5 in San Antonio.

Obstacle Course



By Pat Fick
CAN-DO Director

During Christmas break, I decided to hike the longest trail in Texas, the Lone Star Hiking Trail. It provides 96 miles of walking

pleasure through the Sam Houston National Forest, extending from Richards to Cleveland.

At mile 71, my journey became a bit complicated. The San Jacinto River bridge was non-existent and I'm not a swimmer, so I had to use my phone's GPS to figure out a detour around this obstacle. Six miles later, I was ecstatic to be reunited with the trail.

The next day I had another opportunity to use my GPS. Due to downed trees, the Lone Star Hiking Trail is officially closed between trailheads 13 and 14. So, I dialed up a route and started down the highways and byways. My GPS led me to a dirt road, which was rather nice at first: no traffic to contend with, and beautiful wooded scenery! Then it started to become a challenge.

There were downed trees everywhere, and the path I was supposed to follow became invisible. I started climbing over and under trees, sometimes walking on downed trees as if they were a balance beam. I finally took off my backpack so that I could scramble over or under the trees without getting stuck on protruding limbs. The most concerning issue was being in the middle of the woods and having no clear path to follow.

I cried out to God for help and in my mind felt Him urging me to "trust the blue dot and keep moving forward!" Seeing as how I didn't have a lot of other options, I kept trying to line up my path with the blue dot of the GPS.

What seemed like hours later, I finally found a real road again! Thank you, Jesus!

Our lives are filled with obstacles too. How do we navigate the unplanned illnesses, job losses, relationship trials, financial insecurities or lack of direction for the future? What is the blue dot we need to follow?



I find encouragement in Isaiah 30:20-21: ***"And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left."***

Jesus is the Way! He has given us His Word to guide us, and His Holy Spirit to empower us. Though it may be scary, you can trust Jesus (the blue dot) to guide you through the obstacle course called life.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Psalm 25:4

Celebrating in Georgetown



Raelyn Pracht
LCEF Marketing Specialist

On Dec. 22, Faith Lutheran Church, Georgetown, marked a monumental achievement: paying off its \$3.9 million loan from the Texas District Church Extension Fund (Texas CEF). This milestone was the culmination of years of dedication, faith and the collective efforts of the church community.

The journey began in 2008 when Texas CEF approved a loan to construct the church's new sanctuary. Over the years, six capital campaigns — each lasting three years — fueled the steady progress toward debt repayment. Additionally, the church strategically leveraged annual loan rebate checks provided by Texas CEF's unique program, accumulating over \$300,000 in rebates. These rebates, made possible by the faithful investments of church members, played a crucial role in paying off the loan.

The significance of this accomplishment was celebrated with a heartfelt note-burning ceremony, symbolizing the end of the loan. However, the day held even more blessings. Faith Lutheran Church welcomed three new members into their family through the Sacrament of Baptism — one adult woman and two teenagers. These joyous moments highlighted the importance of having a space where faith can grow and lives can be transformed.

Faith's partnership with Texas CEF stands as a testament to the power of shared vision and investment. Each contribution, large or small, has played a part in building a sanctuary where God's work continues to flourish. This achievement reminds us that our investments can create lasting legacies, impacting lives for generations to come. Your investments make a difference.



From left, Revs. John Selle and Walt Pohland burn the "note" for the new sanctuary.



Gentrys and Upbring Bring Healing & Joy to Foster Siblings

Kids do best when they have a close bond with at least one parent who takes care of their needs and gives them a safe, loving home. Sadly, this wasn't the case for siblings Bella, 4, and Madeline, 3, who suffered physical abuse and were exposed to domestic violence at home. But life for these little girls was about to change for the better when Lauren and Pierce Gentry of Fort Worth, decided to become foster parents.

The Gentrys knew they wanted to foster even before having their own children, Isaiah, 3, and Lanie, 1. Their desire sprang from a church sermon that highlighted the need for foster families in their community. "We got home from church, and both said, 'Yes, we should definitely do that,'" Lauren recalled. Also, when Pierce was in high school, "I had a close friend who was in foster care move in with us and I saw the impact a caring family could have on someone," he said.

The Gentry's plans to foster were delayed, however, when Pierce's job necessitated a two-year move to California, where the couple wouldn't have a strong support system.

When they returned to Texas in 2024, the Gentrys revisited their dream and became licensed foster parents through Upbring Foster In Texas (FIT). Lauren praised FIT Area Director Toni Peters for answering "tons of questions" and rearranging trainings when there were scheduling conflicts. "And when she came to our house to do our walkthroughs and inspections, she was so sweet."

When Bella and Madeline arrived that December, the scene was both exciting and chaotic. "Our two kids and the siblings were running around and screaming and playing with toys and jumping," said Lauren. "It was very sweet and Bella and Madeline were just excited to be here."



(Left) Pierce and Lauren Gentry with their biological children, Isaiah and Lanie.

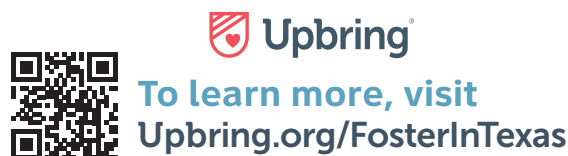
(Right) The Gentry children admire a North Texas winter's day in their jammies. From left, Madeline (foster sibling), Isaiah (biological child), Bella (foster sibling), and Lanie (biological child).

The Gentrys are committed to supporting the sibling's birth family, hoping the girls will be safely reunited with their parents or a relative. They haven't ruled out adoption if it's ultimately best for the girls.

Lauren says that while fostering can be difficult when younger biological children are involved, she and Pierce have faith that the empathy, compassion and love they've shown the siblings will positively impact Isaiah and Lanie.

"We talk to our children about how God calls us to love others, and fostering is a way to live out that purpose," she said.

The Gentrys' story is a reminder that children can find safety, care and hope through foster care.



Stay updated with the latest Upbring news and stories by following us today.

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Lutheran World Relief – Texas Ingathering 2024



Volunteers worked hard in Houston (this photo and left) and Plano (top).

The LWML Texas District was hard at work the first two weeks of November, organizing Lutheran World Relief (LWR) ingathering collection sites in Marion (near San Antonio), Houston and Plano. With the donations from all over the state, four semi-trucks were filled with quilts and kits and were delivered to LWR warehouses for distribution around the world.

Our prayer is that these donations will bring hope and care to those suffering from homelessness and

despair caused by natural disasters and war.

The LWML Texas District thanks the women, men and youth of our congregations who volunteered and made the ingatherings such a success. To God be the glory, knowing that the love of Jesus is going out into the world through quilts and kits.

Collected were 15,307 quilts and blankets, 9,360 school kits, 10,468 personal-care kits, 1,593 baby-care kits and 470 fabric kits.

Orphan Grain Train Houston Branch: Building Hope

The Orphan Grain Train (OGT) Houston Branch had an exciting 2024. Construction began on the Servant Center warehouse in Pasadena and was slated to be completed in February. Dedication is scheduled for March 23. The new building will allow expansion of the mission with capacity to sort, pack and distribute more resources to those in need.

The Houston Branch was amazed to see the outpouring of support in 2024. With the financial and physical donations received, the Houston Branch was able to expand their out-

reach by providing support to two emergency foster shelters, multiple homeless outreach organizations, a veteran's transition center and a battered women's shelter along with other missions in the area.

OGT Houston Branch felt called to send support to the victims of Hurricane Helene. God answered the call by filling two 26-foot box trucks with donations, which were delivered in October and November.

For more information on the LWR ingathering or OGT, visit lwmltxdist.org/mission-service.

2024-26 Mite Goal: \$403,000

Mites received through Dec. 31: \$144,908
(\$258,092 still needed)

Mission Grants paid through Dec. 31: \$84,814

Send your mite offerings, along with a remittance form to:

LWML Texas District
Attn: Alissa Elley, Financial Secretary
P.O. Box 183
Seguin, TX 78156

